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SPRING 1968

signet

The spring staff of *Signet*
for the year nineteen hundred and sixty-eight
dedicates this issue to
Mrs. Gordon K. Chalmers

Triolet

That yellow sycamore outside the glass,
The one that's shedding blue, is green they'd say.
And here the boys' cropped heads inside the class,
That yellow sycamore outside the glass,
And spring-rain color overbrims to pass
To clear-rimmed pencils, desks of every day—
That yellow sycamore outside the glass
The one that's shedding blue, is green they'd say.

MAUREEN HORAK

Chatham

Saturday the snow came
and smothered us.
As you walked along the bay
I wanted to be a flute player
to record your footsteps.
But I'm not, and so
tracking of your journey fell
to the mute and undiscerning snow.

What inside you makes you turn
Your back on land
and face the sea?
Keeping your watch beneath the light
That does not notice as you pass?

You stand rooted as dune grass,
but tossed as beach cans,
rolling and returning
to be flung again to the foam.

I cannot reach you,
cannot offer what it is the beacon gives,
but I can let you know
I mark your passing and I wait
for your returning home.

LESLIE DAVIS

Sandy Cove

I

Sandy Cove wakes up early. In winter, darkness still lies beneath the hard stars, throwing its tarpaulin over stinking eyesores—scallop shells beribboned with guts, skeleton-tailed fish heads, turtle shells, shark carcasses, bushel baskets overflowing with crushed and broken crabs. Sandy Covers wrench their living from the sea, fighting it from birth to early death, becoming bent and weathered as the scrawny cedar trees constantly warped by southwest winds. At five o'clock lights grope through chilling, pre-dawn blackness, as wives and daughters get up and put fresh coffee grounds in the pot. They move with the dull efficiency of experience, breaking eggs into spitting-hot spiders, toasting thick slabs of bread, stirring salt into yellow grits. Their men leave warm beds reluctantly, blinking into kitchens to dress in heavy jerseys and work pants, grunting as they pull clammy rubber boots over wool socks. They eat silently, with great swilling gulps of coffee, and glancing through salt-sludged windows at the sky.

"Yew goin' far ouwt tewday, Joe?"

"Oi down't know. Mullet 'bout stopped runnin'; been catchin' more theem sting rays then feish."

"Sam Benton waeighed in foive hunnerd pounds feish yeisterday."

"Weil, Sam didn' git no hammernose cogh t'n hes net, an' nier git 'is han' bit off 'fore he could kill it. Yew got moi coffee rehdy?"

"Theat Oi heave."

Dawn is sneaking up as muffled figures move toward their docked boats; Diesel engines cough and blast to life. Bow and stern lines whap into the water, their cork marker buoys bobbing as wakes churn in spreading V's out of the cove. The fishermen are blind to the raw, harsh sound lying in a liquid sheet of flame as the sun spreads over it his first baleful stare. They stamp and blow for warmth as the first breath of wind hurls spray inboard. Down

the sound, around the point, out the inlet into crashing surf, beyond into giddy swells, they move with dogged persistence. Once out onto the ocean they split up without looking back, each boat heading for a special reef or shoal. They do not notice the hungry flocks of gulls swooping and fighting over them. These will follow the boat all day, rewarded at last for their vigil by guts and trash fish tossed overboard when nets are cleaned and drawn up masts to dry.

Crews rig up the nets, ready to let them out as the captain slows and heads into the swell.

"Hey Sam! Yew 'bout rehdy t' go?"

"Theat Oi ehm! Lhet 'em ouwt!"

The boat gives a lurch and settles into the steady, throbbing strain of pulling the gaping net through oily waters. The men are silent, sitting with slack muscles waiting to pull the net back in. For an hour they cruise, smoking and drinking coffee from their thermos jugs, testing the net's weight from time to time with tugs on the lines. The captain motions for a crewman to take his place at the wheel, then rocks his way forward to test for himself. He jerks his chin up, the boat is slowed, and the crew starts to haul on the lines.

"Sam! Loek ohver t' port! Sharks!"

"Boi Goid Oi'll not lhet 'em eat *moi* nets—*Pull!*" They pull in desperate, dry-mouthed urgency as the seething, boiling patch of sharks moves in relentless.

"Hammernose 'n th' nets!"

Leaping silver crescents spill over the deck in a flashing wave as the bulging nets are heaved over in reckless haste. The twack-thwack of fish flipping to return to the water is deafening—the men curse in gasps, muscles knotted. One last heave, and the net slides over the gunwales. A great hammerhead shark lies still for a moment, stunned by his fall to the deck, then explodes into furious arcs, his razor teeth tearing huge slashes in the mass of netted fish.

The men wade knee-deep through living silver, teeth clenched, to club the shark to death. He does not die quickly, but writhes and twists in shuddering spasms, ripping his way out of the net. His head is a pulp of bloody gristle before he finally subsides, belly flashing white, his horrible jaws wide in the rictus of death.

The men reel, their energy cut off suddenly with the shark's death. They pull on their heavy gloves and bend to throw his carcass overboard, not waiting to see the bloody feast of his packmates. Wearily, they stoop to shovel their catch into the ice holds,

and draw buckets of seawater to wash the slippery deck. The captain takes the wheel again, heading east, toward home.

II

Sandy Cove droops in the heavy glare of a July sun. Shadows lie thick and black—lines of clothes strung across littered back yards are motionless, baking in faded pleats. Swarms of swollen green flies drone as they crowd over the heaps of garbage under shaky piers. Mangy fishmarket cats pick through piles of shrimp heads, too indifferent to growl or spit at rivals. The hard inside spirals of conch shells shattered for their meat gleam scarlet against the dry white of bleached scallop and oyster shells on the cove strand. The drowsy buzzing whirr of locusts drifts over the heat-shimmer of placid water. Birds are silent, stupid, in the still, hot air. Children sprawl listlessly in scanty patches of cedar tree shade; their mothers rock and fan on front porches.

"Muh-ther! We gowt'ny orunge crush?"

"Oi down't know—louk t'th' oice boix."

"Oi *ehm,* buht Oi down't see nuhthing buht them doiet *pep*-sihs!"

"Git a dholler ought'n moi bag, then, an' run ohver t'th' store fer sum. Toi th' doig uep 'for yew go."

"He's eun-der th' how-se . . . he woin't foller me."

A screen door smacks. A tiny, barefooted girl shakes her curly black hair and skips between the sagging pales of a sandfence. Her feet are too hard and calloused to be cut by the shell road-bed, but she watches for the long-thorned sandspurs growing in matted clumps along its edge. Sweat forms in runny drops on her face, and she twitches her mouth to catch them with her tongue as they slide down. She hums a tune in rhythm with the cartons of empty bottles banging her skinny legs. A big black dog lopes up, his plumy tail whirling as he digs his claws in the road and hurls himself at his mistress. Dog, child, and bottles tumble to the ground in a tangle of black and brown.

"Git *owf* me, yew *fooul!* Yew've near broke them bottles . . . Oi oughter beat th' *foire* owt o' yew!"

The dog keeps her pinned with one enormous paw on her stomach, and seizes her bare arm with his teeth. His ferocious growls and her shrieks draw no more than a glance from the marble-shooting circle of boys nearby. Finally, the tallest unfolds to his five-foot four and strolls over. He jerks the dog to its hind feet with a yank on its leather collar, then frowns down.

"Sis, Oi've told yew t' quit showin' owf weith theat doig. Deid muh-ther say yew could brieng hem t' th' store?"

"No, Meister Smarty Pants . . . he *follered* me!"

"Weil, git yo'rself eup an' quit makin' a fooul o' yo'rself, or Oi'll *tell* her."

She scrambles to her feet, gathering the scattered bottles.

"Yew *do* theat, boiy, an' Oi'll tell 'er Oi saw yew keiss Mae Willis 'hoind th' church ater prayer meetin' last week. Oi bet she'd loike t' know whoi yew gowt re-*lig*-ion all uf uh sudden!"

She whirls and runs for the safety of the store, whistling to the dog. He bounds forward, yipping, and snapping at her ankles.

"Yew stay owtsoide, noiw, Blackie!"

The store is dark and cool after the blazing afternoon sun. Pausing to let her eyes adjust, she sniffs the exciting smells—cheese, bananas, bacon, coffee, suntan oil. She slides her feet slowly on the worn wooden floor and sets the bottles down carefully.

"*Ir*-vin! Yew ien t' th' back? Oi woant sum orunge crush!"

"Git it yo'rself, suger, Oi'm busy . . . put yo'r dholler ien th' cash boix. Yew bring yo'r bottles?"

"Theat Oi deid!"

Stepping outside a moment later, she blinks and gasps at the sledge hammer blow of heat. Blackie trots beside her, his pink tongue lolling in rasping pants. The boys have abandoned their game of marbles, and eye the drinks speculatively as she passes.

"Hey, *Sis!* Gieve us uh couple theim orunge crush. Yew cain't drienk *twelve!*" She stiffens defiantly.

"Oi wiel *not!* These're for me'n *muh*-ther; them doiet pep-sihs to *home*'re *yours*." Gripping the cartons tightly, she walks sideways past her brother.

"There she goies, boiys, th' crab uh th'year!"

"Yahnnnh!" She sticks out her tongue and turns her back deliberately. "Come oin, Blackie. Wei'll go see if ole Mae wants a drink!" Taking a deep breath, she starts to run again, and stumbles a little under the weight of the full cartons. When she turns in at the gate, her mother is still rocking on the front porch.

"Oi thought yew'd goit ruen oh-ver yew toek so long. Siet down an' rest a whoile—it's too hoit t'be runnin' aroun'."

The girl edges the screen door open with her big toe and slips inside. She goes back into the kitchen, opens the refrigerator door, and puts all but one of the drinks inside. She listens for the creak of her mother's chair, then pops the cap off her bottle on a drawer handle. Her mother's feet hit the floor with a thump.

"Annie Lou Grady!"

"Yes'm?"

"Yew pop theat bottle on uh drawer handle?"

"Yes'm."

"Bring me th' floi swatter ought t' th' porch."

"Yes'm."

Slowly, she lifts the swatter from its hook by the door, and trudges out to her mother.

"Hoiw meny toimes have Oi told yew t' use theat *op*-ner?"

"Oi down't know – – – maybe four."

"Four *hun*-nerd more loikely. Turn aroun'."

Annie turns around, closes her eyes and hunches her shoulders while her mother gives her several firm swats. She feels a light kiss on the top of her head.

"Noiw be-*have.*"

"Yes'm."

"Oi down't know *whut* Oi'm . . ." A crashing, booming clap of thunder drowns her words. They look to the west. Great black clouds have piled up in a threatening mass. Forked tongues of lightning snake out. A puff of hot air rustles through the trees.

"Moi *Goid!* Oi gowt *clothes* on t' th' loine!" Mrs. Grady dashes into the house and reappears with a red plastic laundry basket. Annie has vanished. A dark streak hurtles out from under the house—Blackie has seen her head for the path to the cove. He catches up with her at the crest of the hill, and she laughs delightedly. Together they plunge down the steep slope.

The sun is hidden. Nothing stirs in the thick clump of cedars at the water's edge; the spiky marsh grass is rigid. Across the sound, white houses gleam eerily; a few gulls float down and land on the beach. Their squawks are loud in the silence. A grey veil advances from the west, pocking the surface of the sound. A few drops of rain plop—big as quarters. A steady drumming, barely audible at first, increases in intensity. Suddenly the cedars shudder; the reeds are whipped double; whirling sand rises to sting and blind. Annie heads in a crouching run for an overturned boat and slithers under; Blackie whines and follows. Together they lie in the sticky darkness, listening to the wind and rain whistling, lashing through the trees. A small puddle forms and seeps under the boat, widening slowly. Annie strokes the quivering dog—he licks her hand.

Gradually, the rain's fierce drumming slows to an occasional spatter. They crawl out from their shelter and breathe deeply. Blackie shakes, sending drops of water flying. The air is fresh and salty. Birds flutter and burst into trilling concert. Small

waves lap at the cove mouth; a big gull preens himself casually on the wet sand. In soft pinks and lavenders, the sun rolls from beneath its umbrella.

Annie walks slowly up the path, her feet breaking through the thin damp crust, spilling pale sand over her footprints.

"Cum own, Blackie. Oi woant me an orunge crush."

III

The night breeze is a whisper, breathing softly through the sea oats. The sea lies shimmering under a summer full moon, surf murmuring and sucking at the edge of cool white sand. Ghost crabs scuttle silently at the tideline, snatching bits of garbage left by receding waves. The moon rides on a slack anchor, nodding through clouds sliding by.

A mile behind the dunes there is no gentle murmur, no virgin sand. Asphalt and crushed shell roads shift on their beds under the tread of man and his machines. Colored lights strung in gaudy profusion flash to show *Sandy Cove Gen. Store—Drink Pepsi!* A dozen men and boys mill around the gas pumps, jostling and laughing. Their beach buggies are drawn up in ranks, a herd of grotesque metal horses waiting to gulp gas. Oversize tires bulge obscenely under empty wooden flatbeds where back seats and tops have been cut out.

"Hey *Ir*-vin! Gowt'ny them D batt'ries left?"

"Do Oi gowt whut? Turn down theat radio, Becky! Oi swoire them girls'll bust yo'r earbones 'fore they git it loud'nuff. Whut'd yew woant?"

"Oi gowt t' git sum batt'ries for moi flashlight—me'n Sam'n uh bunch o' th' Grady boiys thought we'd go a huntin' tonoight."

"Reckon Oi do—over there ownto th' back shelf."

"Oi gowt 'em—put me down for four, Ir-vin—Oi ain't gowt uh doime or uh doimond."

"Theat Oi weill—yew'd better git started—moon's hoigh noiw." Whoops and yells mingle with the blare of horns. Toby Grady pops his clutch and scatters gravel as he roars out toward the ocean road.

On the beach, seagulls squawk in protest as they are awakened. Heads pop out from under wings; feathers are fluffed and settled with a flirt—they soar up to crisscross the moon in ragged patterns. Great dark shapes break the rippling seaface and lumber heavily through the surf. Their shells gleam wetly as water streams off in diminishing rivulets. They move slowly up toward the high-water mark, wide flippers cutting swaths in the loose sand. They

crunch over shells and driftwood left by the ninth wave, and lurch to a halt. Female turtles dot the beach for miles, drawn to lay their eggs in danger, to leave them buried in the incubators of warm sand until they hatch and complete the cycle. They begin to dig with swimming motions of their huge, paddle-shaped flippers, gradually carving out wide shallow trenches. When the trenches are finished, they begin the egg cavity in the center. With swift, incredible precision, they use their front flippers to scoop out a cylindrical undercut hole about a foot deep and two feet across. The flippers are used one at a time, dipping into the hole extended, then curled around a load of sand, and brought up with the loss of only a few grains. The sand is flung backwards, and the other flipper descends into the deepening hole.

When a turtle has completed the hole to her satisfaction, she draws her hind flippers together and proceeds to lay her eggs. They are white and leathery, almost perfectly round: dented ping-pong balls. She may lay as many as a hundred eggs before she uses her hind flippers to pat sand into the nest, covering them gently. They she slews her vast body around, obliterating the nest's position before she begins her slow trek back to the safety and darkness of the waiting sea.

Headlights flash onto the strand, shooting their beams skyward as the beach buggies bounce over from the ocean road.

"Slow down, Toby! Oi see the first 'n!" The lead buggy skids crazily to a stop, and three black shadows flit out and run to cut off a turtle's retreat.

"She's done laid! Turn 'er ohver an' we'll foind the nest later." Their voices are lost in the clatter as the other buggies speed past. The three strain to turn the turtle on her back, where she lies helpless, flippers moving aimlessly. They leap back into the buggy and roar off in pursuit of the others, passing dozens of turtles already flipped, some beside their unfinished nests. They reach the island's point, and gather to smoke and drink beer before they start back to load their night's haul.

"Oi gowt th' bieggest damn turtle Oi've ehver seen—took foive uf us t' turn 'er ohver—must weigh siex hunnerd pound!"

"Han' me th' opner, Sam. Now Oi ask, whut guid's uh beer if yew gowt no opner?"

The moon is setting as they turn around and start picking up the turtles and robbing their nests. They work in teams, four men to a turtle, grasping her by the flippers and heaving her in three swings onto the buggy flatbeds. When the last one is loaded, they plow over the dunes for home.

"Oi down't know as we gowt more'n three hunnerd. Last year we must'a hauled twoice theat."

The gulls circle and plummet, screeching and clawing at a few broken eggs left in the ruined nests.

DUART BRITTON

Seismogram

To Arseniy A. Tarkovsky
2100 GMT
12/XII – 67

Earth's deeper tones grip roots, touch bark,
Press up and hold me close around.
A silent throb. But through your art
I hear Earth's resonating sound.

How vague and indistinct the signs
That Her great core is living, beating.
You set up cadences and rhyme—
Reverberation in my being.

To Earth-Her Own! The R's and L's!*
Your pen ticks out our Earth's pulsation.
Can English catch that beat as well?
I tune for it in my translation.

EDMUND T. WEIANT

* The letters R and L play together as the fundamental tones in the lead poem, "Slovar" (Dictionary), in Tarkovsky's book of verse entitled "To Earth, her Own."

Eclipse

shadows float
skim upstairs downstairs
in giant strides before me
spilling across doorsills
flooding the outdoors
eclipsing
geometric fences
jagged bird wings
frothy tree tops
especially people
most of all me
bigger than I am
rubber man, balloon man, stick man
I cover everything
and cast a dark and murky unreality
down on fields in thickish liquid
extend a fist
and slam a black blight on the grass
I fling the night, throw it, pour it
sling it at a great opaque red barn
reducing myself to gray

URSULA ALEXANDER

Irrational Reason

I heard when something said I ought
to reason every action through
and check each rash and wayward thought.

I heard, and yet, of course, I knew
the choice was gone when I was caught
between propriety and you.

TILDA TODD

Why Am I So Wise?

I was trying to drown this beetle at the beach. It was black. I had dug a hole in the sand so that water came in. I had put in the beetle and held him under with a discarded paper plate. Then, prepared to examine a dead beetle, I took away the plate. I was shocked sharply to see him struggling against the side of the hole. I tried again and made sure he was all the way under, but when I took off the plate he was very much alive, as before.

Then it happened . . . I realized that he must have been holding his breath and that he was an individual having feelings and thoughts all his own, like everybody else. I even realized that this was a very important thing to know, and felt proud because I knew it.

So the third time I held him under water I held my own breath as long as I could, and then lifted the plate.

BECKY BECK

Flower Woman

Against her hot black skin
Her dress is an autumn sky.
"Flowers, flowers, fresh flowers," she croons—
Her nouns leap out and fly.

Across the square that's greyed
By a silent silver mesh
Of cans and walks and quiet signs
She flings her flowers, fresh.

Her rounded cheeks flush brown
Beside the straight-lined towers;
She chose the perfect breeding spot
For all her noisy flowers.

A pleasing fracas here—
The frigid city curves
And a woman selling chrysanthemums
Who knows that nouns are verbs.

MAUREEN HORAK

The Purpose of Fathers
(To Hall)

Something about the way
A bird flew
Reminded me of you:

The leap into vacancy
From a safe limb
On an airy whim,

Trusting the world to contain
Something to seize:
The reason for trees.

JAMES LOVELL

Horizon

Since sudden spring and summer showers have been
Your first experience in living, then
You think old age will be surprising too.
But it will come gradually to you
Like winter. As there was no certain day
You outgrew dolls, replacing children's play
With serious games, so all beginnings blend
Together and anonymously end.

TILDA TODD

In Olive Groves

Slipping away from my riding companions unnoticed was relatively simple, as it was not unusual for me either to lag behind, or race impatiently ahead of the rest of the group. The sloping Spanish hillsides were heavily dotted with row after row of top-heavy olive trees. Each painted, twisted trunk supported a huge network of bushy limbs, sheared perfectly round so as to touch the trees on either side yet not entangle them. The pattern was so symmetrically spaced that as I loped through the endless rows I sensed an invisible gap closing behind me with each crashing contact my horse's hoofs made with ground. The pulsating animal beneath me and the perpetuity of pounding hoofs, seemingly incapable of being stopped, gave me an insurmountable feeling of power. Barely ten years old, I felt the passage of time was non-existent, and the faster I raced through that unending maze the farther my thoughts fled from reality. Miniatures of my life sped across my mind clearly, yet blurred as soon as they appeared. Images paired themselves with speeding olive trees, and a half-glimpse at each knotted trunk flickering by dislodged an old memory and erased it in the same instant. My head was spinning; the trees no longer moved but grew stationary directly ahead, blocking my path. Images changed suddenly from familiar objects to abstract, indescribably horrifying dimensions toward which I had no sensitivity or control. As unexpectedly as I had entered that foliaged limbo, I left it when I burst onto a flat grassy field, stopped suddenly, and left a child's enigma in a labyrinth of olives.

BECKY BECK

to stand far out
anxious in early afternoon
on a sea-moss jetty
for the swell of shallows

is to know before the hour
the gulls circling over,
greedy mouths sharply open,
leaning hulls that lurch into noble stance
with taut canvas arms outstretched,
and surprised fishes in whirlpools
(some will be dashed dumb onto barnacle walls,
will churn with the sea, and then lie—
with no eyelids—on top of the water, flat slivers
of low sun).

to stand far out
(an opening between two seasons;
the smack of phosphorous before the kindling's sleep)
is to know before the hour
the glass moon waiting
(opaque)
for the turning of the tide.

ELIZABETH EARLE

New Orleans

The old boats docked along the bay
Throw shades of lobster, brown and green
And one is called *L'Infortuné.*

Wet wood smells from the battered quay
Where I sit to watch what I've always seen—
The old boats docked along the bay.

The sun is bleached cold white today—
The boats lie peaceful, worn, and lean
And one is called *L'Infortuné.*

But light can sift another way
Now ropes define the cool, serene,
The old boats docked along the bay.

Some of them will creak away
When just a few will cut routine
And one is called *L'Infortuné.*

Yet constant life on ragged spray
Could match this deadly anchored scene,
The old boats docked along the bay—
And one is called *L'Infortuné.*

MAUREEN HORAK

Friend — Twenty-five

I was rich on you
in those days,
days of fall and spring,
the days of days
weeks, and almost a month

we could afford them too.
love was cheap then.

That's why we drank our booze
smoked our cigarettes,
loved at night,
and laughed at the sun in
the morning.

but it's too expensive now

we better pay the tab and
go home.

JEAN BRUCE

An Accident of Time

by

Elizabeth Earle

At an ordinary sort of hour, midday, I was having a cup of coffee in a very decided placed named *Nicolas' Breakfast* where I often went to pretend anonymity among mass enemies. I would always sit alone there, amid the dense, smoky air and customers, alone at a far brown table just under the grandest Victorian mirror that was fastened to the wall with gilded bolts which I'm sure had become one and the same with the wall in the last fifty years. Nicolas, the patriarch, I knew had opened this establishment as a jab at Main Street and the church next door (Methodist) which he claimed to be completely useless institutions, and he was not going to be ordered around by anybody else's money or faith! And so Nicolas was the first man (and a foreigner at that!) to serve spirits to those easily beguiled puritans who had been in this part of the state, it seemed, since the birth of Christ.

I say "mass enemies" because usually by noon of every working day, I would be convinced that I was being oppressed by the wills of those unfortunates in my office at City Hall who, like machines, had no appreciation whatsoever for silent meditation, dreaming, black coffee, and the essence of literature. As far as they cared, life began at 9:00 A.M. and ceased to be of any import after the 5:00 P.M. dismissal, when they would run, like ants, to their hats and coats, pop in another stick of Wrigley's and temporarily retire from existence out the door, full of clichéd farewells.

But all of them habitually came to *Nicolas'* for luncheon. I went there to secretly punish myself for ever coming to the town in the first place. The restaurant had finally been accepted as "respectable" several years ago when the management was taken over by one of the first families. Old Nic was still around, though, and lived upstairs in a room which no ordinary citizen was ever allowed to visit. Periodically he would appear at the bottom of the stairs by the rest-rooms, and stand hollow-eyed amidst the humdrum and sometimes very impolite conversation, like a cast-iron

statue, a chewed-off cigar in the corner of his mouth and his ancient fingers clicking on the head of his cane.

I'm not sure exactly why, but whenever I so seldomly would see the old man, I'd wish to say something to him, ask him about when he first came to Hobbs Point. They say that at one time he was quite a colorful figure. He was one of the few people in the town I really was curious about. I wondered if he still had a foreign accent, and indeed what would his voice sound like? I imagined all sorts of fantasies about Nicolas as I saw him standing there, rather alone, like I was. As I looked around the great swarming room to the men at the bar, their polished shoes caressing the rims of the stool legs and steady hands raising glasses to alternately pursed and active mouths, faces turned resignedly toward the television and its incoherent design of talk and picture; as I watched these ant-men living out their noon hour, I wondered, very deeply, what that man by the stairs was seeing, what he was hearing with those ears that had an abundance of white hairs bristling on them. Perhaps he was sensing nothing, but dreaming, like I often did over my stacks of papers and all those stacks of bland people.

I sat at my dark table that day and watched Old Nic walk, with great effort, down the stairs and assume his regular stance, one knee a bit crooked to keep his balance. One of the bar girls I knew named Molly, went immediately to him, her apron rustling and her large bosom rocking, with a frosty glass of some liquid which he took instinctively, responding to Molly's attention with a very thin smile.

Just then a young man from the office who was always attempting, in his boisterous though good-natured way, to get me to join him for lunch, pulled up a chair so that his arms rested on the back, and as he sat (I always thought, absurdly) backwards on the red leather seat facing me with a grin that showed his teeth all the way to his molars, and then pounding on the table with his fist, said,

"Well, Miss MacRea! How's the coffee? Ha!" A bit startled by this confrontation, I tipped my cup sufficiently to have spilled some into the saucer.

"My God, Henry," I said patiently, "how do you always manage to surprise me like that?"

"Maybe someday I'll really surprise you, huh, Miss MacRea? Ha!" Henry must have laughed for five minutes after that, and I presented my usual after-the-kid-has-written-all-over-the-wall-with-crayon reaction, and glanced at the ceiling.

"How are you and your girl—oh, what's her name?—Julia, getting along these days, Henry?", I asked deliberately.

"Oh, fine, I suppose. But you know there's not a whole lot to do around here. We sometimes fight just because we're so bored with the usual. Anyway, after you've known somebody since grammar school you sort of run out of conversation, ha! I really can't decide when I'll marry her!"

"Yes, I can certainly understand that!" I interjected, as I did several other times during the remainder of Henry's soliloquy on love, while my attention again turned to the ceiling. For a moment that ceiling was as enchantingly powerful as the huge mirror behind me or Nicolas, who was now perching on the bottom step like some primeval bird, all angles of elbows and knees webbed in almost transparent skin. In swallowing his refreshment, Nicolas' throat tensed and the Adam's apple moved over its ground with determination.

"But you know, Miss MacRea, Julie somehow doesn't provoke in one week the fascination that you command right now, here in this unbelievably ordinary corner. Well, it's sort of the way you, well, you're really apart from all the rest of the people here, and the noise and the TV, and well, lots of folks wonder why you come here at all, just sitting here and drinking coffee for an hour . . ."

"You think I'm rather mysterious," I stated more than questioned. A waitress interrupted with a loud cough and asked if there would be anything else today (another cup of coffee, a piece of blueberry pie, a sandwich?) No there would not, I thanked her, and then looked directly at Henry, lit a cigarette, and purred, "Tell me, Henry, do you know anything about old Nicolas over there?"

"Well, sure," he answered, a bit confused, "everybody knows Nic. He's been here for centuries. In fact, he might even be a cousin of mine,—by marriage, of course."

"Do you know anything about him, personally, I mean? Like how does he spend his time? Do you ever visit with him?"

"God, no. Nobody as far as I know, has ever been to see, much less talk to the old guy in years, except to say hello in passing. But they say that once we was quite a scholar, as much as a Greek could be; that is, an immigrant Greek, Ha!" As Henry went on to describe the legend of Nicolas, I felt a wave of electric interest begin to overcome my pretense of aloofness. I listened with my hands folded tightly across the table from Henry's animated face that was rimmed with masses of black hair and great thick spectacles, which he for gesture's sake would remove and

wave in the air to make more emphatic some most exciting chapter of the history.

Nicolas had been the father of eleven children, who all moved to Boston with their mother in the late forties. Before then the family had lived in a large frame house down by the river, which since had been demolished by the city to make room for a new cannery. Nicolas owned this restaurant and ran it cheerfully and with prudence. But certainly the end of the house was not what had made the family leave. When Henry began to describe exactly why they left, the corners of his mouth twitched with glee and he loosened his tie as if to make room for whatever was to come out of his clean-shaven throat. I found myself wide-eyed in anticipation. Nicolas had had a woman other than his wife, and would meet her after closing hours every Wednesday night and every Saturday night. She was what is commonly, and sometimes disparagingly, called an old maid school teacher, who taught (Henry pondered) English at the Hobbs Point high school. They say she was a very small creature with honey-blonde hair which she wore crumpled in a knot at the back of her neck, and who unfailingly dressed in the same grey suit and bone hairpins each day. Nicolas never seemed to mind. At any rate, the startling thing about the affair was that there was no attempt whatsoever to conceal the eternal tryst. She would meet him at the restaurant and they would walk together, arm in arm, down Main Street, occasionally sitting in the park for a while. Nicolas would always hold his head up high, in a starched white collar, and if anyone happened to take any overt notice of their disapproval, he would be sure to quickly kiss his straw-like lover on the cheek for all the world to see.

It used to be a game for a band of children (perhaps some of his own children's friends) to follow them, hiding behind bushes and lampposts, and giggling at opportune moments. They knew, as well as Nicolas and Katherine (for that was her name), that when the couple reached the white frame house down by the river the Greek's wife would be waiting on the front porch, in front of a lighted window, her large silhouette pacing back and forth. They knew that she would wait there until she saw her husband and that school teacher coming around the corner and then she would disappear into the house, perhaps avoiding not so much her husband's eyes, as those pale blue eyes of Katherine's that seemed to freeze her to the marrow of her bones.

At this point I interrupted Henry to ask if the wife ever demanded that Nic stop seeing Katherine, or that he leave the house

forever, or anything drastic. But apparently not. Nic would go into the house and leave his dear friend on the porch and return almost immediately with several books under his arm and a lamp. The two would sit on the porch swing for hours, into early morning at times, and read aloud from Robert Browning, Shelley and Lord Byron. Once it was reported that during the winter when it was bitterly cold, they sat in the parlor and read passionately an entire novel by Victor Hugo for a whole night. When the children aroused themselves in the morning and began puttering around getting ready for the day, Nicolas and Katherine never moved from the sofa but remained transfixed by each other's voices until the novel was finished. Nicolas' wife never left her room.

"Well, how long did this sort of thing go on?" I (in a complete dilemma) asked Henry; I found it difficult to believe all this of the silent, parched man on the steps. Although everyone in the town must have known, I was beginning to feel that I had no right to listen to this; that it was almost criminal to listen as he stood there. But still, I was eager for Henry to continue.

"About three years, as the story goes, Miss MacRea," said Henry delightedly. "Amazing, isn't it? And what of Nic's wife? What you would expect; she went crazy."

One Wednesday night, they say that Nic and Katherine had turned the familiar corner and instinctively looked to see the light in the window. There were no lights,—for the first time in three years there were no lights. The two were rather puzzled and hurried to see if, indeed, something were out of order. The steps of the porch seemed unusually loud under their footsteps. The front door was locked, as were all of the windows. Nic broke a pane and somehow managed to unfix a catch and they got in only to find the house completely empty. His wife had taken everything; the children, the furniture, the food from the pantry, and of all things, Nicolas' complete collection of books that he had rested lovingly on three tiers of shelves which he had made himself from fine oak boards. The shelves were also gone.

A few weeks later Nicolas was informed by one of the customers at the bar that his wife had been planning her escape for quite some time, sending parcels of possessions away by train every month. Nicolas had never noticed. He had also never noticed that his wife had been going quite mad ever since he had met Katherine, and had hardly said a word to anyone for three years. Indeed, he hadn't noticed that one by one, his children had been entrusted to various neighbors only to be repossessed by his wife when she left the community.

Henry and I turned at the same instant to look again at Nicolas over by the stairs. I watched him finish the last of his drink, wipe his mouth with the back of his knotted hand and replace, in its niche, the black cigar butt. A vacuous stare covered his whole face like the evening that was to be again, and like all evenings that had come before. I wanted, almost desperately, to ask Henry about Katherine. Where had she gone? Why was Nicolas not with her now? But there was no time.

The stirring of most of the present customers to get back to their sterile pleasure of work forced me to regain consciousness of duty, that frail taskmaster. As Henry and I gathered ourselves up from our conversation, I saw Nicolas looking at us. He moved his mouth very slightly and began to stand up with his cane. As I turned to go I thought for sure that the old man caught a smattering of my mind in my expression. I felt almost horror in the fact that he must have known that I had found out, and that I too would condemn him, by the very fact of my understanding. I started to speak to him, but could find no words. I would ask no more questions. I wanted to say that I would never ask another question, especially about Katherine. I would never even mention her name.

But Henry pushed me along with the crowd and paid for the coffee. Too quickly we were outside, and the dull heat seemed to suffocate me. My eyes ached from the sudden blast of white light so common to the outside of dark places. I fumbled for my sunglasses and shoved them onto my face. I leaned on Henry's arm as we walked, trying to keep my eyes closed as much as possible, perhaps because of the light, and perhaps because I was walking away from *Nicolas' Breakfast* and that very thin smile.

Song

Long since have my earlier years moved along
The actual limits,
The actual limits, the edge of my world,
Along the green pathways, and through deep-blue Eden.
It seems I am losing this heaven forever.

The willow tree sways on the bank, on the shore,
Like pale hands so graceful.
To cross over the bridge to the end, I don't dare,
But take in remembrance of our final parting—
The liquid and resonant sound of your name.

In radiance standing
She washes her milky white hands in the waters.
I stand before her in perpetual debt.
If I could but tell just who stands on the mead,
Who stands on the shore
In back of the willow tree like a *rusalka,*
And casts a bright ringlet from finger to finger!

ARSENY A. TARKOVSKY
Translated by
EDMUND T. WEIANT

The Field

We wondered how the clouds could lie that still
suspended low in fatty grins of white
while sun poured down a lazy fall of light.

The wildwoods brushed our legs on the close-lying hill
and quiet summer shivers bent at will
the stalks of every daisy, to our sight.

They'd slope first to the left, then to the right
not breaking till we had our pockets' fill.

Perhaps we were naive and smug—we smiled
to make some hands of dog-eared weeds our own
not seeing that we'd have to leave too soon,
and marveled at ourselves for growing wild.

But how we held—before, we'd never known
the stillness of a moving field at noon.

MAUREEN HORAK

Valentine

If perhaps I could shake your shoulders bare
and then, past winter, lift you
up with sudden chill almost,
I would know the sound of the wild duck
laughing from under black tendons,
from under grey questions;
I could wish you to a place where
wooden eyes have no secrets, past winter
I would shake you, my thumbs pressed deep
into your pulse, I would shake you

until our ears caught the same noise,
until our faces spoke the same language,

until your perfect paper heart groaned
full and erupted, filling
all rivers with its thick, scarlet spring.

ELIZABETH EARLE

Tell It True

Lawdy! Mercy! I see you
Comin' faw me two by two.
What is I susposed to do?
Stop right here an' tell it true.

When I was small my Mammy said,
"Do whut's right or you be daid,"
'Cause she done caught me in da red
Takin' an extra piece a' bread.

She thought I learnt her teachin' good.
If only I'd learnt whut I should!
I tried 'bout hard as I could . . .
Got caught agin — stealin' wood.

Mammy begged, and den she cried.
She felt bad 'cause I ain't tried.
She said she 'spected dat I lied.
Den I knew my goose was fried!

Mammy said dat I was bad
An' dis was whut had made her sad.
Den I really did get mad
At myself faw de nerve I had.

I been bad, I 'mit it's true,
And I does things I shouldn't do,
But dis is whut I'm tellin' you,
An' dis is somethin's really true:

Life ain't as long as you may think.
Day ain't nuff time to steal an' drink—
It ain't long fo' you in da clink,
Den a while an' you soul'll sink.

Lawdy! Mercy! I see you
Comin' faw me two by two.
What is I susposed to do?
Stop right here an' tell it true!

KATHLEEN MITCHELL

Dependence

hung from a thread
I spiderlike dangle
legs and mind in disarray
my lifeline's end between clenched teeth
all criticisms and harsh words held back
not spoken, lest the tiny thread get free
to drop me falling spiralling
into the whirling dim abyss of loneness
separated from the hand
that holds so carelessly the thread's beginning.

URSULA ALEXANDER

Cry Wolf

"You're lying! I heard it! I know I did!"

"For God's sake, quit yelling at me!"

"I won't. How can you expect anything else after what I heard you say? You didn't know I was listening, did'ya. You didn't, I know . . ."

"You don't know anything. You've let your mind go wild, that's what. You're beginning to make things up—only hearing things you *want* to hear!"

"That's not true!"

"Yes, it is! And I can't stand it like this much longer . . . this, this nagging and bitching, this distrust—you sneak around the house as if you expected to find something!"

"You're changing the subject again. We were talking about you."

"Oh, is *that* what it was!"

"You can cut the sarcastic bit—who was that on the phone?"

"You mean you weren't listening on the extension?"

"Shut up, dammit, and answer my question!"

"I hate domineering females. That means you, in case you didn't understand."

"Who was on that phone!"

"None of your damn business!"

"I bet,—I bet it was that person who calls here all the time and asks for you—who is she?"

"What person? What are you talking about?"

"Quit pretending! Oh, you're so funny when you lie—it doesn't become you to be honest."

"You're sick—everything about you is sick. These three months with you have even warped *my* mind."

"Your mind was warped to begin with! I took you in because you didn't have a job—I was trying to be nice."

"Nice, hell! The nicest thing that could happen to me right now would be to get out of this place."

"All right, get out! Go mooch off some other fool. I'm tired of puttin' up with you and your secret phone calls and secret trips when you don't come in . . ."

"But I'm doin' all that for you—for us. Doncha' understand?"

"Boy, that's a new one! Since when did you think about anybody but yourself?"

"Honey, listen . . ."

"Don't honey me—I'm sick and tired of it. Just get out!"

"Whaaa . . .?"

"Get out!!"

"Well, O.K., if that's the way you want it. Not skin off my back . . . You know you might be sorry after I'm gone. It'll be too late then."

"There's plenty more men like you around. Don't think for a minute that you hold any kind of candle to . . ."

"Oh, and I suppose you're a perfect example of a woman. Hell, all you are is a dirt-cheap tramp, who'll take anything she can get!"

"You wish!"

"Huh?"

"God, you're so stupid I can't stand to be around you any longer. Get out of here! Get *out!*"

She heard the door slam and the key turn. At last she was alone again. Why did they put her through such torture? This was no way to get well. They didn't understand at all. The phone began to ring again, only this time it was louder. She groped to answer it.

"Somebody stop that phone! *Answer* it!" she screamed.

The door opened and a nurse walked into the cell.

"The phone! Answer the phone!" Now she was sobbing.

"But there is no phone—no call, no voice—*nothing,* my dear."

"You're lying! I heard it! I know I did!"

RHETA LANEHART

Two Alike

"I'm miserable," she cried,
"Oh, for something new!"
"Not I," her friend replied.
"I'm miserable," she cried,
"But I'd be satisfied
With what I used to do."
"I'm miserable," she cried.
(Oh, for something new!)

TILDA TODD

Riverboat Party

We sit in the dark
and crush the beer cans with his hands, my foot,
and strike bright flares for cigarettes.
We sit in the dark
and peer through long thick grass at the water's moon,
and think the words we want to speak.
We sit in the dark
and when a noisy glaring riverboat drifts by,
we try to forget how easily
it intruded.

URSULA ALEXANDER

Everyone Loveth the Cheerful Giver

A Ballade

Your problem, sir, was one time mine,
For I was antisocial too,
Yet thought my way of life was fine
Until I met a fellow who
Had scads of friends—to name a few,
Althea, Bertram and Hilda Mae.
You wonder how? Well here's a clue:
The man possessed an obliging way.

This lovely man was quite benign;
His sacrifices daily grew.
He stood so long at the end of a line
Sometimes he never made it through.
And if the sky were azure blue,
"A little greenish" I might say,
Then he'd remark, "Ah, yes, it's true,"
For he possessed an obliging way.

He tried to let his good works shine,
(A lesson here for me and you)
And gave his pearls away to swine
(The Bible is easy to misconstrue.)
In wrecks with him, who'd dare to sue?
He'd given all he had away
And even total strangers knew
That he possessed an obliging way.

Envoi

I've made my point with much ado;
Consider it without delay.
My friend has made it clear to you
For he possessed an obliging way.

TILDA TODD

About Esenin

by

Mary Rodgers Quinlan

Selections from a research paper, edited and translated from the Russian by E. T. Weiant.

Сергей Есенин

Portrait of Esenin: Yurii Annenkov: Dnevnik moikh fstrech T. I. *Inter-Language Literary Associates* (New York, 1966).

Russian poets! We abuse each other.
The Russian Parnassus is rife with squabbles.
Yet something native binds us all together.
Any one of us is, in part, Esenin.

And I'm Esenin too, but wholly different.
My kolkhoz horse was rose of hue from birth.
Like Russia, I am now of harder steel
And, like Russia, have less birch in me.

My dear Esenin, Russia's greatly changed,
But there's no point in weeping over this;
I fear to say the change is for the better;
To say it's for the worse is dangerous.

I'm hurt at times, and this brings bitter feelings,
And my strength fails when fighting all this nonsense;
Life drags us under the wheel
As a scarf dragged Isadora to her death.

We must live . . . There's no salvation we can find
In vodka, women, or the noose.
It's you will be our saviour, Russian land.
It's your sincerity, Esenin, that will save us.

And having borne myself with civic honor
In all the squabbles of our joint Parnassus,
And done so because Esenin was a poet there,
I state: "Indeed, you're beautiful, my Russia!"

Excerpts from
Letter to Esenin by
Evgeniy Evtushenko (1)

To whom has this famous contemporary Russian poet written? Why this concern to reestablish connections with the Soviet past? Esenin is one of the few literary figures of the troubled twenties to be "rehabilitated" in recent times. While Esenin's works are now published in the USSR, Yevtushenko's *Letter* still passes from hand to hand. But what about this former un-person, Esenin, one of Russia's greatest writers? This is his story.

I

Sergey Esenin was born September 21, 1895, to a peasant family who lived in the village of Konstantinovo near Ryazan. At an early age he went to live with his grandparents, whose influence on him the poet later recalled:

> Grandpa used to sing me the old songs, those slow and measured sad ones. And on Saturdays and Sundays he would tell me stories from the Bible. (2)

His granny would recite for him the old folk legends and tales, and throughout his life, Esenin would cling to his love for popular traditions, legends from the past, folk limericks and songs. Here are the roots of Esenin's creativity, deeply attached to the soil of peasant Russia, to his family and to all of nature.

Originally he had intended to become a teacher, but Pushkin opened up to him a whole new world of poetry and Esenin began to write. His first collection of poems. *Radunitsa* (*Rainbow*), was published in 1916.

Esenin greeted the revolutions of 1917 with enthusiasm, for he expected a rapid improvement in peasant life and a complete victory of peasant interests. While associating with the revolutionaries, he continued to cherish his dream for his "wooden and vegetable Russia," and continued to write in praise of the Revolution until he saw what was happening in the rural villages amid the widespread death and devastation of war and famine. To him, it seemed that mechanized civilization had trampled down his flowers and

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(1) George Reavey, ed. translator, *The New Russian Poets 1953-1966, an Anthology* (October House, N. Y.: 1966), p. 111.

(2) E. Naumov, *Sergei Esenin, Zhizn' i Tvorchestvo* (Moskva, 1965), p. 5.

meadows; that the Revolution meant a brutal struggle of the city to subdue the countryside, to destroy everything he loved, believed in,—everything that was a source of inspiration to him.

Even so, he attempted to understand and accept the new reality. He genuinely wanted to conform to the new ways and wished only to become a great poet of the new life as Mayakovsky had done.

In 1921, Esenin first met the American classical dancer, Isadora Duncan. They became lovers and were married in 1922. Neither one could speak the other's language, but they found a common meeting ground of communication in high living and heavy drinking. They traveled around Western Europe making headlines wherever they went. All the time he was away, Esenin longed for the peasant rural scene and grew to hate the industrialized capitalistic West. These few years with Isadora have come to be called the "Tavern Moscow Cycle" in his writing. The poems of this period are considered decadent, vulgar and degrading by most Soviet critics. Actually, Esenin was trying unsuccessfully to sing in praise of the new Soviet State. In seeking to emulate its roughness and brutality in his own life, he became a famous tavern brawler and rowdy. Counting himself a lost soul, Esenin sought ultimate refuge in drunken oblivion.

When, in 1924, he returned to the village where he was born and raised, he didn't recognize the place. Everything had changed. Young Communists were singing propaganda jingles turned out by poster-poet Demyan Bedniy. The old songs were forgotten. (3)

The disenchantment of this last poet of the Russian countryside was no secret to Esenin's friends or to other writers. (4) Tormented by a sense of personal failure, disappointed by the Revolution and alienated from the new Soviet way of life, Esenin hanged himself in a Leningrad hotel room. It was the Christmas season in 1925. He left these last lines, written in his own blood:

In this life, to die isn't new.
But to live, either, isn't new. (5)

The news of Esenin's suicide aroused widespread feelings of depression and despair, since the inner conflicts that doomed the poet were the very ones that afflicted many educated Russian young people. His poetry reflected this dark mood of the younger generation that was to be called the "Eseninshchina" or the "Esenin Problem." (6)

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(3) S. Esenin, *Sobraniie Sochinenii v 5 tomakh*, Vol. 2 (Moskva: Gosizkhudozhlit, 1961), 170. (This source will be indicated hereafter as *Esenin, S. Soch*)
(4) *Ibid.*, p. 97.
(5) *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 138. (English translation by Mary Rodgers Quinlan)
(6) Marc Slonim, *Soviet Russian Literature, Writers and Problems* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 17.

Prominent Bolshevik leaders pondered ways to cope with this harmful pessimistic attitude which seemed to point to suicide as the only answer to Soviet life. It would have been dangerous to the Party to allow such a figure as Esenin to become a heroic symbol. It was for this reason that during the first years of the Stalin era the works of Esenin were suppressed and that only a few of his less "harmful," that is to say his purely nationalistic or politically neutral poems, appeared in print. This dim-out of Esenin lasted until the end of World War II, the Great Patriotic War, as it is known in the Soviet Union.

II

Censorship has long been a constant feature of Russian cultural life. The censor stands off-stage and behind him stands the government. As early as 1905, Lenin wrote that literature must serve the proletarian state. (7) After the Revolution the State Publishing House, *Gosizdat,* was established and to this day controls through press monopoly the Soviet literary community.

The author of the *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich,* Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, in an *Open Letter to the Fourth Congress of Soviet Writers,* touches on some of the disastrous effects of long-standing control by censor:

> Writers have revised chapters, pages, paragraphs; they have sweetened them only because they wanted to have them published; and in so doing they have damaged them irreparably . . . It is obvious that these mutilations are pernicious for works of talent, but quite imperceptible in others . . . At the same time the labels used by the censorship are ephemeral. They are changed and discarded before our eyes. Even Dostoyevsky, the pride of world literature, could not at one time be published in our country (even today he is not published in full). For how many years was Esenin considered a 'counter-revolutionary' (and were not people imprisoned for possessing his books?) . . . The literature of our country appears today more flat and worthless than it is in reality, than it would look . . . if it were not being prevented from developing. The loser is our country. (8)

Since many of Esenin's earlier poems had a marked religious tone, while the later works included some that were considered anti-Soviet, the writer was most sensitive to the problem of censorship, as these lines show:

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(7) *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia* (Moskva: Gosnauchinst "Sov. Ents," 1948). p. 1471.
(8) A. Solzhenitsyn, "An Open Letter to the Fourth Congress of Soviet Writers from Alexander Solzhenitsyn," *Survey,* No. 64 (London, July 1967) p. 177.

I'm not your canary!
I'm a poet!
And I can't hold a candle to these Demyans.
And what if sometimes I'm a drunken bum,
As compensation, my eyes behold
A vision of enchanted worlds! (9)

From 1925 to 1946, Esenin's works were published in only a few small editions in the order of ten to twenty thousand copies. Some of his poems appeared in anthologies. Hundreds of thousands of Demyan Bedniy books were available at this time, however. The process of Esenin's rehabilitation in recent years can clearly be seen in the following table, which lists the important editions of his works since 1926.

Soviet Editions of Esenin's works from 1926-1965 (10)

Year	Title	Number of copies	Number of poems
1926	Sobranie Stikhotvoreniy	10,000	No data
1927	Sobranie Stikhotvorenii	20,000	" "
1931	Stikhi i poemy	10,000	" "
1933	Stikhotvoreniia	10,200	" "
1934	Stikhotvoreniia	15,000	" "
1940	Stikhotvoreniia	10,000	" "
1946	Izbrannoye	57,000	" "
1952	Izbrannoe	75,000	151
1955	Sobranie Sochineniia	150,000	218
1958	Sergei Esenin	150,000	261
1961	Sobranie Sochineniia	500,000	344
1965	Sergei Esenin	750,000	362

It would seem that Esenin's rehabilitation has the earmarks of a planned process, graded upward so that when his *Collected Works* were published in 1961, one might say he was fully reestablished. Not only did the number of copies put into circulation increase, but so did the number of poems in each edition. Those poems which did not find a place in the 1961 edition were included in the most recent 1965 publication.

Somehow, a man whose personal tragedy touched so directly the life of a whole generation, could not be totally erased from

(9) Esenin, *S.Soch*, Vol. 2, p. 191.
(10) Refer to the recently published bibliographical listing for publications of poetry in the USSR, 1900-1955: Tarasenkov, An. *Russkie poety XX veka, 1900-1955* (Moskva: Sov.Pis.), 1966.

memory. During those years when his works were not published, his poems were copied out by hand from existing editions and passed along from friend to friend. Even today, Esenin is one of the best beloved Russian poets in the Soviet Union, and whenever his books appear at a newsstand or in a bookstore, they are sold out in record time.

And now let us take a look at a representative group of Esenin's poems.

III

Esenin was an incomparable master of the lyric form. His lines pour out sadness, love, and at times an unrestrained rebelliousness. (11) He learned his poetic craft from Blok, Klyuev and the Symbolists as well as from other peasant writers. In those early days the writers would gather in the evening at their favorite Petrograd café, *Brodyachaya Sobaka, The Stray Dog.* In 1918, Esenin joined the Imagist group, which held that in poetry the most important element was the creation of images that follow one another in succession. Esenin also used the rhythms, vocabulary and similies of folklore and these gave a strong national character to his lyrics. (12)

Esenin loved his country roads, the old birch trees that cast their shadows across the ponds—all the pictures he recalled from a happy childhood. His earlier poems reflect this mood especially. One of his best poems and a perennial favorite dates from 1913: *Beryoza, The Birch.* (13) It is written in trochaic trimeter, a characteristic folksong beat. The hushed sibilant sounds create an impression of peaceful stillness and falling snow. And note his use of gleaming color!

The Birch

The white birch
Under my window
Covered with snow,
As if silver.

On the light branches
With snowflakes edging,
Clusters blossom
With a white fringe.

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(11) B. Mirz, translator, *Vo Ves Golos* (Moskva: Progress, n.d.), p. 384.
(12) Marc Slonim, "Writers and Problems," *Soviet Russian Literature* (New York: Oxford, 1964), p. 17.
(13) Esenin, *S. Soch.* Vol. 1, p. 88. (English translation of *The Birch* by Mary Rodgers Quinlan).

The birch stands
In sunny stillness.
And the snowflakes burn
In golden fire.

And the dawn, lazily
Coming round,
Sprinkles the branches
With a new silver.

The third stanza in transliterated Russian:

e sta-EET bi-RYO-za
FSON-ny ti-shi-NYE
e ga-RYAHT sne-ZHEEN-ki
vzo-lo-TOM ag-NYE.

Nebesniy Barabanshchik, The Heavenly Drummer (14) was written in 1918 during Esenin's early Imagist period. He praises the Revolution in this work, expressing his faith in its success:

Hail to the Revolution, may it live forever
On earth as in Heaven!

This long poem is filled with distinct images, such as the following references to the Whites in the Civil War:

White herds of gorillas . . .

Or in another, a nasty image suggested by the old Russian custom of kissing holy icons:

What do we care for all that icon spittle
Up there on the courtyard gate?

But then a particularly beautiful figure:

The stars, like leaves,
Flow in rivers on our fields.

And the entire poem, too long to be included here, moves along with a steady marching beat.

Esenin wrote *Mir Tainstvenniy, Mysterious World,* (15) in 1922, at the time when he recognized the nature of the Revolutionary threat to rural Russia. In this poem he portrays the village as a living creature being hunted down by the merciless city:

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(14) Esenin, *S.Soch.*, Vol. 2, p. 71.
(15) Esenin, *S.Soch.*, Vol. 2, p. 111. (English translation of *The Mysterious World* by Mary Rodgers Quinlan).

The Mysterious World

My mysterious, my ancient world,
Like the wind you have quieted, stilled.
Behold! The stone hands of the road
Have grasped and throttled the village.

And the ringing sorrow in fright
Has fluttered into the blizzard.
Welcome to you, dark destruction,
Alone I'll come out and greet you!

O city, your merciless grip
Has penned us like carrion and dirt.
Fields cool in the ooze of sorrow,
Oppressed by telegraph poles.

The devilish imp's strong-muscled,
And faggots of iron are easy.
What then? We shall not be the first
To wander away and get lost.

O, welcome to you, beast beloved,
Not in vain you yield to the knife.
Like you, I'm pursued on all sides;
Run the gauntlet of iron foes.

Like you, I am always prepared,
And hearing the triumphant horn
My last mortal leap will yet try
To taste the enemy blood.

And what if I fall in the storm,
And am buried in mounds of snow?
On the other shore will be sung
The song of revenge for my death.

Let the heart be gripped in suspense,
That's the song of animal rights!
. . . That's how hunters quarry the wolf
And grip it in jaws of the beast.

The beast's cornered; and now from the depths
A trigger is ready to pull . . .
The beast leaps, and its fierce tusks tear
And devour the two-legged foe.

Moskva Kabatskaya, Tavern Moscow (16) is a series of four poems written in 1922 at the time when Esenin was trying to reshape his life in accordance with the spirit of the times. He writes of the dregs, the prostitutes and crooks whose lives he shared in Moscow's worst dives. At this time, Esenin was being more and more influenced in his writing by the patterns suggested by Blok and Pushkin. (17)

Tavern Moscow

Yes, now it's decided! Forever
My home and my fields I've forsaken.
The poplars no longer will sound
Their flying leaves over my head.
My hovel will crumble without me,
And my old dog died long ago.
God, on Moscow's contorted streets,
Fated my death without doubt.
But I love this town, be it muddy,
Be it tawdry, decrepit, decayed.
Asia, drowsy and golden,
Sleeps on its gilded domes.
And when the moon shines out,
Shines . . . the devil knows how!
I go with my head weighed down
Through a lane to a tavern I know.
Screaming and noise in that den,
And all the night through till dawn,
I read my verses to whores
And brew spirit with bandits.
The heart beats faster and faster;
Already I falter and say:
"Like you, I am one of the lost.
For me there is no going back."
My hovel will crumble without me,
And my old dog died long ago.
God, on Moscow's contorted streets,
Fated my death without doubt.

II

Once more they quarrel and cry,
To the sombre accordion's wail,
And remembering Muscovite Russia,

(16) Esenin, S.*Soch.*, in Reavey, George, Slonim and Marc, eds. and translators, *Soviet Literature, an Anthology* (New York: Covici, Fried, Inc., 1934).
(17) Frances de Graaff, *Sergej Esenin, A Biographical Sketch* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), p. 107.

They endlessly curse their lot.
My head droops lower and lower
And I drown my eyes in the wine
To avoid looking fate in the face.
To think of things for a moment.
Oh, Russia is merry today!
The home-brew flows in a river!
The sunken-nosed accordion-player
Sings of the Volga and Tcheka.
There's spite in their insane gaze,
And their speech is proud and unbroken.
They regret the foolish and young
Who wasted their life for a passion.
They regret that unsparing October
Misled them in merciless blizzards,
And with fresh daring they've sharpened
The knives they conceal in their boots.
Where are you who have left us behind?
Do our beams shine brightly upon you?
With vodka the accordion-player
Curses the pox of the Kirghiz steppes.
No! Such people can never be scattered!
Decay makes them wilder still!
You, Russia . . . you, Russia,
Asiatic land.

III

Play, accordion, play! Boredom, boredom . . .
The player's fingers flash like waves.
Drink with me, mangy bitch,
Drink with me.
You've been fingered and soiled
Past all bearing!
What are you goggling at
With those blue sparks of eyes?
Do you want a black eye?
You're only fit for a scarecrow.
And you won't leave me in peace.
Play, accordion! Play, my unending!
And you, bitch, come drink, drink!
I'd much rather have the one with the bubs,—
She's more stupid.
You're not the first woman.

There's a crowd of you.
But it's the first time
With a bitch like you.
Sting well and resoundingly, pain!
Here or there, what's the odds.
But I'll not put an end to my days.
Go to hell.
It's time to cool off
Toward your dog's pack . . .
Dearest . . . I'm crying . . .
Forgive me . . . forgive me . . .

IV

Sing! Oh that cursed guitar
Your fingers dazzle and dance.
Could we but choke in these fumes,
My only and faithful friend!
Don't look at her quivering bangles.
Or her shoulders' shimmering silk.
Joy I sought in that woman,
But I found my ruin instead.
I knew not love's a contagion,
I knew not love is a plague.
She came up with narrowing eyes
And drove the hooligan mad.
Sing, Sandro! Sing once again
Our former riotous youth!
Let the worn-out, beautiful trash
Go and make love to another!
But stay! I won't blame her.
But stay! I won't curse her.
Oh, let me but sing of myself
To the twang of those strings in travail . . .
My days' rose cupola shimmers,
And my heart's full of golden dreams.
How many girls I have fondled,
How many women embraced!
Yes! There is one bitter truth on earth:
I spied with the eye of a child
How dogs sniff a bitch in turn.
So why should I be jealous?
Why should I grow sick at heart?
Our life's but a sheet and a bed!

Our life's but a kiss and oblivion!
Sing, then, sing! These hands' fateful swing
Hold all fated misfortune . . .
Only be sure . . . send them to hell . . .
But never, my friend, shall I die.

Sovetskaya Rus (Soviet Russia) (18) is the sad account of Esenin's visit to his home village in 1924. Nothing was as he had remembered it. Everyone had forgotten him. Cut off and alone, he still refuses to hand over his art to a successor and continues on his way, alone.

Soviet Russia

The hurricane has passed. Few of us survived.
There aren't many left on the roll call of friends.
I returned again to my country homeland
Where I hadn't been in eight years.

Who is there for me to call upon? With whom shall I share
This sad joy, that I survived?
The mill is still here—the bird of wooden beams
With its one wing—stands shutting one eye.

No one knows me here.
But those who remembered me forgot long ago.
And there, where my father's house once stood
Now lies a heap of ashes, covered by a layer of road dust.

Life seethes.
Around me scurry
Old and new faces.
But no one for me to tip my hat to,
Nor in whose eyes I can find refuge.

A raft of thoughts are going through my head:
What is this country?
Could this be a dream?
You know, I'm almost a gloomy pilgrim for everyone here,
Goodness knows from what faraway country.

It's I!
I, a citizen of the village,
Whose only claim to fame will be
That here a peasant woman gave birth
To a scandalous Russian poet.

(18) Esenin, *S.Soch.* Vol. 2, p. 168. English translation by Mary Rodgers Quinlan with some passages from Patricia Blake and Max Hayward, eds., *Dissonant Voices in Soviet Literature.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964.)

But the voice of thought says to my heart:
"Come to your senses! Why are you offended?
You know, only the new light is burning
In the huts of the next generation.

You have already begun to shed your blossoms;
Other youths are singing other songs.
They, please, will be the interested ones,—
Not the village, but the whole land is a mother to them."

O, homeland! How absurd I have become.
A dry blush rushes to my hollow cheeks,
The native tongue has become foreign to me,
As if I were a stranger in my own country.

I see:
The Sunday villagers
At the meeting, gathered as in church.
They discuss their "life"
With their clumsy unwashed speeches.

Evening is here already. The sunset
Splashes the gray fields with a fluid gilding.
The poplars thrust their bare feet
Into the ditches like heifers under a gate.

The lame Red Army man with his sleepy look,
Forehead wrinkled in remembrances,
Importantly tells about Budenny,
About how the Reds repelled the attack at the Perekop.

"We gave it to them, this way and that,
That bourgeois . . . that one . . . in the Crimea.
The maples are wrinkling the ears of their long branches
And the peasant women are sighing in the deathly still twilight.

The peasant komsomols go up the mountain
And accompanied by an accordion, in the early waking hours.
They sing the propaganda songs of Damyan Bedny,
Celebrating the dale with their happy shouts.

Such is the country!
Why did I ever bother
To shout in poetry that I was the people's friend?
My poetry isn't needed here anymore,
And if you please, I am not needed here either.

Oh well!
Forgive me, my native place.
I was pleased with the way I served you.
Let them not sing my things today—
I sang them, when my country was ill.

I accept everything.
I take everything.
I am ready to follow the chosen path.
I will give my whole soul to October and May,
But I will not give my dear lyre.

I will not commit it into someone else's hands,
Not to my mother, friend or wife.
She entrusted her sounds only to me
And sang her tender songs only to me.

Blossom youth! Be healthy!
You have a different life; you have a different melody.
I am going alone to unknown bounds
As a rebel soul forever seeking eternal peace.

But then,
When in all the earth
The enmities of people pass,
Falsehood and sadness disappear,
I will sing
With all the essence in a poet
The sixth part of the world
With the short name "Rus."

Do Svidanya, Moi Drug, Goodbye, My Friend (19) is Esenin's farewell note to the world, and contains the best known lines he ever wrote. It is a beautifully proportioned work of art with its smooth measure and play of sound, ever a problem to his translators.

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(19) S. Esenin, *S. Soch*, Vol. 2, p. 138. (English translation by Mary Rodgers Quinlan.)

Good-bye, My Friend

Good-bye, my friend, good-bye.
My dear, you're with me in my heart.
A destined parting
Promises a meeting in the future.

Good-bye, my friend, good-bye, without farewells or words,
Without weeping or sadness.
In this life to die isn't new,
But to live isn't new, either.

Transliteration of the original poem:
da svi-*DHAN*-ya, droog *MOY*, da svi-*DAHN*-ya.
mi-lee *MOY*, tyi u-men-*YA* vgru- *DEE*.
pred-na-*ZHA*-che-no-ye ra- sta- *VAHN*- ye
ah-besh-*SHA*-yet *VSTRE*-chu vpe-re-*DEE*.
da svi-*DAHN*-ya, droog *MOY*. bez roo-*KEE* e *SLO*-va.
nye gru-*STEE* e nye pye-*CHAL* bro-*VYEY*.
ve- toy *ZHEEZ*-ni oo-mi- *RAHT* nye *NO*-va
no e *ZHEET*, ka - nesh - na nye no-*VYEY*

As a concluding thought, I would say that if Esenin's story is any criterion, the attempts made by the Soviet authorities to obliterate literary works have not been a total success and will never be whenever a writer has established a close contact with his people and has evoked their feelings with his artistic creativity or by his personal example. As Solzhenitsyn said, it is true that Soviet literature has been crippled and has therefore not measured up to its earlier standards. Many, like Esenin have tried. Regardless of the way Party leaders actually feel about this man, the restoration of Esenin's literary works will have its good effect on the improvement of the quality of Soviet writing.

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Between Us

I knew your death today. It came to me
directly (ignoring all the silent time
between us) with a dread finality.
I want to answer it with choked regret.
What would I say? I wish I'd seen you off
to war? I meant to write? I hear your laugh
already at such foolish caring late—
a reckless laugh of life that dared to be—
and sobering my grief, it brings a smile to me.

TILDA TODD

New Making
(to a student)

The entropy of autumn is upon us
The green systems summer displayed
Fall to winds. Valves in stems close
And trees push away their leaves.
The dandelion puffs intricate parachutes;
Survivors of the wreckage lie still and wait.
Bees ball up in the hive; honey congeals.
You come away from father's house
And mother's table. Summer lovers
Who leafed out your sunbrown days
Step from the circle, promise to write
And pursue tangents of migration beginning
Before the geese go. The blue wheel turns.

The room where we meet is empty.
Outside, leafrakes gather summer's rejects
Into new greetings under new names.
Come in from the vacancy of air.
We will grow a new becoming
Appropriate to our heated interiors,
Organize somehow a space among us
By pride and pretense and need.

You are my ordeal in the ordinary.
The dailyness of our dalliance with misconception
Is the rock I roll back up on the hill,
And I to you am withered surrogate.
What need have we of each other?
What love to name this imperative?
Neither father or lover I touch
Only in metaphor your metaflesh
Whatever summer seems to keep saying.
My voice hums in your inattention.
You turn greenseeing eyes toward me,
Your summer heart a hard quiet seed

Desire of summer faded, we desire
Winter desire, loosing what is not
Possible for what is. And must be.
Fiercely grip me in your need for need.
And I will pierce you with relevance.
The lie we both know to be lie
Will between us sprout fecund bloom
And leaf of most fantastic hue.

JAMES LOVELL

The Citadel

Cannons belch.
White fumes drift
Over cold steel and burnished brass.
Silk stripes flap, rippling in the sun
While transparent smoke mutes giant stars.
Rows of black caps, white gloves, spit-shined shoes
Stand paralyzed—waiting,
As the guns spew their salute.
Deafening thunder, ground shaking tremors—nothing
Disturbs the motionless corps.
Regimental staff shouts commands
Acknowledged by successive echoes.
Edges glisten as sabres are unsheathed
And clank in unison as they are put back.
Hands slap wood as rifles change shoulders.
Rattling guns pound the ground.
Bugles blaring, drums throbbing, bagpipes whining,
Reverberating against the barracks
Two thousand passing in review—
Triple chins in tight collars,
Stiff bodies in scratchy wool,
No eyes under black caps,
A wave of grey keeping step
Engulfs the parade ground.

LINDA McPHAIL

Street Choirs

Curb children
born between the alley and the gate,
converge on the gutters—
crows
which cannot wait for dark.

They light
on offerings of the city,
raked and broken scars they call "the lot,"
which neither yields in shame
nor smiles in pity.

Street choirs
in their robes of scratching wool
add their decibels
to the tone-deaf blocks.

The choruses these brick hearts come to shout,
written on the tire treads,
echo off the walls,
hang from iron ladders,
reverberate and rust.

LESLIE DAVIS

Corinthians I, 13:11

Fluffing at the seams
a too-stuffed bear—his popeyes
hanging loose,

a muscle man of terry cloth
a little squashed and
not quite red,

a gape-mouthed doll
cherubic face still coy but
pockmarks dotting the skull where
ringlets lay,

embrace each other on a dusty
paint curled shelf.

As if for reassurance of their
need, a furry paw rests on the
plastic face, blue vacant eyes
look over much stitched
wounds and bulging
imitation strength.

They lean against a faded
portrait of a bearded man (his eyes
though pale
still stare, a hand
with ineffective fingers
in a calming gesture, glass dulled
by grime of casual neglect)
which, hanging
on an insecurely hammered
nail,
slips a little lower as each
year goes by—
with every shift his gaze more cockeyed still.

URSULA ALEXANDER

The Anomaly

It was the September of the sixth grade, the Tuesday after Labor Day weekend. Julie Muller and Cassandra walked to school. They were still best friends even though Cassandra's mother had told her she was too old to have one. They wore their new dresses today because it was the first day of school. Cassandra's was red with a button-down collar and a full skirt that looked fuller because of her petticoats. It showed off her beige, pincurled hair and made the tip of her ski-jump nose seem redder (it was still sunburned from the summer.) Julie had on a baby-blue jumper with her good Sunday School blouse, the one with tucks in front and ruffled cuffs. Her olive skin had got quite dark from the sun, and her hair was still cut short so it would dry quickly after swimming.

"Gee, Cass, I'm awful glad we both got Miss Alley! Are the twins gonna be in our class?"

"Nah, their mother made them be split up. But, ya know who is? Craig Repensek, and he was the smartest last year!"

The girls went into room 11, Miss Alley's room. The bell rang. At eight-thirty, when it was cool outside, the ring was loud and

echoed the same way forks and spoons did when you dropped them in the cafeteria. Miss Alley stood, called roll, and started class.

"This morning I think we'd all like to hear about some exciting summer experiences. If you have an extra good one raise your hand."

Five or six held their arms up, swished them back and forth, bent and unbent their elbows and flapped their hands.

"All right now, let me see, the boy in the brown shirt,—stand and tell us your name and what *you* did this summer."

The boy stood. He looked as fragile as a Dresden figurine. He must not have been outside much during the summer, because his skin was so white. His head looked big for his body and his hair was cut short letting his freckled scalp show through.

"This summer, oh,—my name is Craig Repensek,—this summer, my family and I went to the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone National Park; but I want to tell about the Grand Canyon. The Grand Canyon is a natural wonder. They have a rail around the edge so you can look down *into* the Grand Canyon. There are lots of colors on the rocks; it was almost as pretty as the Painted Desert that we also went to see. We really had a good time and my father and I got to take a lot of pictures, *in color,* that I brought along to show. I'll just pass them around, if that's all right with you, Miss Alley."

"Yes, fine, Craig, and that may be something to think about for a science project this year. Don't you think it would be interesting, class?"

A mumble started, everyone was saying "un-huh" at different times. Hands went out on all sides around Craig to get the pictures.

"Who else has something to tell?"

Hands pointed up again and the whispering near Craig's pictures got louder.

"Class, let's be quiet now, and look at the pictures *quietly.* All right,—in the yellow dress,—tell us about your summer."

"My summer was a lot of fun."

"Your name, dear? Tell us your name."

"My name is Lisa,—anyways, I went swimming every day, and on the days it rained, my mother let *me* go outside in the rain in my swimming suit. I got my intermediate swimmers badge, too!"

"That's nice, Lisa. Let me see now,—the boy on the row nearest the window. What is your name, and what did *you* do this summer?"

He stood up and looked around the room smiling at everybody.

Then he looked Miss Alley straight in the face and said:

"I'm Tom Traub. Eddie and Lou dared me to chop my pinkie finger off with the Boy Scout axe, and I did!"

Tom slowly pulled his left hand out of his pocket and held it up in the air for everyone to see. There it was, his pinkie, chopped off right above the knuckle. He snickered a little and plopped down into his desk. Girls' whispers started much louder than when Craig had passed his pictures of the Grand Canyon. The boys just stared. Julie poked Cassandra on the shoulder and hissed:

"I hate him,—he's a stupid idiot! He almost flunked the fifth grade. I saw his report card last year."

"Yeah," Cassandra said, "and he doesn't live in a house; he lives in those apartments next to the store. I see him go in there sometimes on the way home."

Miss Alley went to the blackboard and rapped a piece of chalk against it till it sounded as if she were firing a machine gun.

"All right, class, be quiet now! I want the first row, the row nearest the door, to come to the front and take one book from each stack and put them in your desks."

The first row got up, but the girls were still whispering about Tom Traub, and the boys sitting around him were all looking at his finger. Now he wedged it into the pencil holder at the top of his desk. Cassandra and Julie sat in the row next to Tom's. When Miss Alley called their row to get books, Tom wiggled his stub at Julie because she looked back at him when she stood up.

"Julie!", Cassandra said, "You'd better leave him alone. You're gonna get in trouble! Look out, he comin' up the aisle!"

Tom sauntered toward the front. He was a runty boy, thin, with hollow cheeks. The veins on his arms stuck out and were as blue as if he had colored them with a pen. His hands were dirty, especially under the nails. When he got to Julie's desk he poked her, gently, on the cheek, with what was left of his little finger. She squealed and grabbed that side of her face with her hand as if someone had hit her with a spitball. She blushed, and a pink rash crept up her neck and onto her cheeks in spots.

"Girl in the next to the last row, what is your name?"

"Julie Muller."

"Try to be quiet, Julie. What *is* going on back there? And please, say either "yes ma'am" or "Miss Alley,"—I know your parents have taught you to say that."

"Yes ma'am, Miss Alley."

"All right, class, as soon as you finish getting your books, I want each of you to write a story. The title will be *My Summer Vaca-*

tion. Be very careful with your punctuation and spelling. Use your pens, please, and if you make an error cross it out with only *one* line."

Cassandra turned around and looked at Julie but said nothing because she had already started writing her composition.

The bell for lunch rang. It sounded a lot like the morning bell but by the time it rang, good smells from the cafeteria and from lunch boxes in the desks were so strong that the class hardly heard it. Cassandra and Julie stood with the rest of the class at Miss Alley's signal, then, with Miss Alley at the head, marched single file downstairs to the lunchroom. Everyone had to go through the cafeteria line, because the ones that brought their lunches had to get milk and pay for it at the cash register with everyone else. Tom Traub was right behind Julie.

"Ya don't like my finger much do ya Nosey?" Tom said.

Julie didn't answer or even turn around. She took a filled plate from the serving table and put it on her tray. Lunch was creamed corn, meat loaf, and noodles, but Tom had brought his from home in a paper sack with greasy splotches around the bottom.

"Hey, Nosey, I'll trade ya lunches!"

Julie turned and looked at Cassandra, who just shrugged. Tom leaned over Julie's arm that held the side of the tray nearest him. Then, as if he were going to grab something from the plate, he pulled his left hand out of his pocket and stuck his dirty, chopped-off pinkie right into the middle of her creamed corn, making a hole that oozed shut in a second. Julie nudged Cassandra and both of them stared hard at Tom who stood smiling at them, clenching and unclenching his fists inside his pockets. They went through the line, and Julie and Cassandra took their places at the far end of the table Miss Alley's class was assigned to.

"Ya see Julie, I told you you'd get in trouble!"

"I don't care, I *hate* him, he's a stupid idiot! I'm not gonna eat my corn, it's probably dirty, just like he is. I'll get *him!* Come upstairs with me after . . ."

Class had recess after lunch, and the children were allowed to go back upstairs first if they had to go to the toilet. But Julie and Cassandra ran to the classroom. Julie tore a piece of paper from her notebook and printed: TOM TRAUB HAS ANTS IN HIS PANTS! on it. She put it on top of his desk, then took a thumbtack from the bulletin board and put that on the front of his seat, a little to one side. She did it that way because it was sure to at least stick his leg. Craig Repensek, the boy who had been the smartest in fifth grade, walked in, snickered, pulled out another

tack and put it opposite Julie's, so when Tom sat he would get stuck in his other leg too. By the time recess was over and they were back inside, they had forgot about it. Tom went to his desk and read the note. He looked up to see who had written it, and of course Julie was looking right at him, smiling. Tom crumpled the paper and threw it at her, then plopped down in his desk as he had done after Share and Tell. He hit the tacks hard with the back of his thighs and yelled "Hell!" so loudly that Miss Alley came running into the room from wherever she had been. Tom had just got out of his desk and was hopping in the aisle, rubbing the backs of his legs.

"Tom Traub, stop jumping right now! *What* did you just *say?*"

"I didn't say nothin', Miss Alley, ma'am; it was her that did it,—she put tacks on my chair!" he said, pointing at Julie.

"I did not, you stupid idiot! You're a liar!" A flush started up her neck.

"Sit down Tom, right now. The whole class will stay until I find out *exactly* what happened. Finish your stories now,—and I don't want to hear a word out of anyone!"

Julie looked over at Craig Repensek who knew she was looking, but refused to answer her gaze.

Tom sat down mumbling: "It was her,—it was her."

Miss Alley said that she would collect the papers in a half-hour. She walked up and down the aisles peering at all the different handwritings, but hardly long enough to read a sentence. As each person finished she took the paper and put it on the corner of her desk.

"Now, class, take out your arithmetic books and read pages one and two. Work all the even problems on pages three and four. If you have any trouble, come up and ask me. This should be all review; it's very simple fractions with some word problems."

After everyone had finished reading and had started the problems, Cassandra tiptoed to Miss Alley's desk. She whispered to her and looked back at Julie who hadn't even seen her go up because she was having a hard time with a word problem. Miss Alley patted Cassandra's hand and sent her back to her seat; then left her desk and paced the rows again. She stopped for a little while behind Julie. Julie's neck reddened, but before the blush had time to reach her face, Miss Alley leaned over and whispered:

"Julie Muller, I will see you after the bell, today."

Then she went back down the row and said the same thing, quietly, to Tom. But she never said anything or even went near Craig Repensek.

The afternoon bell rang, and sounded far away. It had got hot outside, and the ring that had been so clear in the morning now seemed a mere buzzing. Miss Alley dismissed the class and didn't say anything about what had happened after recess. Cassandra was the first to leave. She waited outside the door till Craig Repensek went out and walked down the hall with her. Julie and Tom had stayed in their seats.

"Ya see," Cassandra said to Craig, "I *told* here she'd get in trouble!"

The Question of Obscurity

Some artists think it isn't good
In general, to be understood,
But I don't wonder if I should,
For I confess that if I could
Communicate, I surely would.

TILDA TODD

NOTES

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Mary Rodgers Quinlan completed her senior year in December and is now living in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Her major was Russian Studies.

Mr. Edmund T. Weiant is a Z. Smith Reynolds Professor of Foreign Languages, and a member of *Sigma Upsilon.* Tarkovsky first came to Dr. Weiant's attention in 1965 through a series of articles in the *New Yorker.* While at the University of Moscow in 1966, Dr. Weiant had the opportunity to review Tarkovsky's published works at the Lenin Library. Several unsuccessful attempts were made to arrange a meeting between Weiant and Tarkovsky at this time. Six poems, representative of Tarkovsky's style, were published in the *Red Clay Reader No. 4* in Weiant's translation. *Seismogram* was written to express the translator's obligation to and respect for the author. It also records that first tremor when translator becomes author in his own right. An acquaintance in New York agreed to send *Seismogram* to Tarkovsky through a mutual friend in Moscow. As it turned out, the poem reached Tarkovsky in time for a special "Literaturniy Vecher," Literary Evening, organized in Tarkovsky's honor, and was included among the poems read that night in Moscow.

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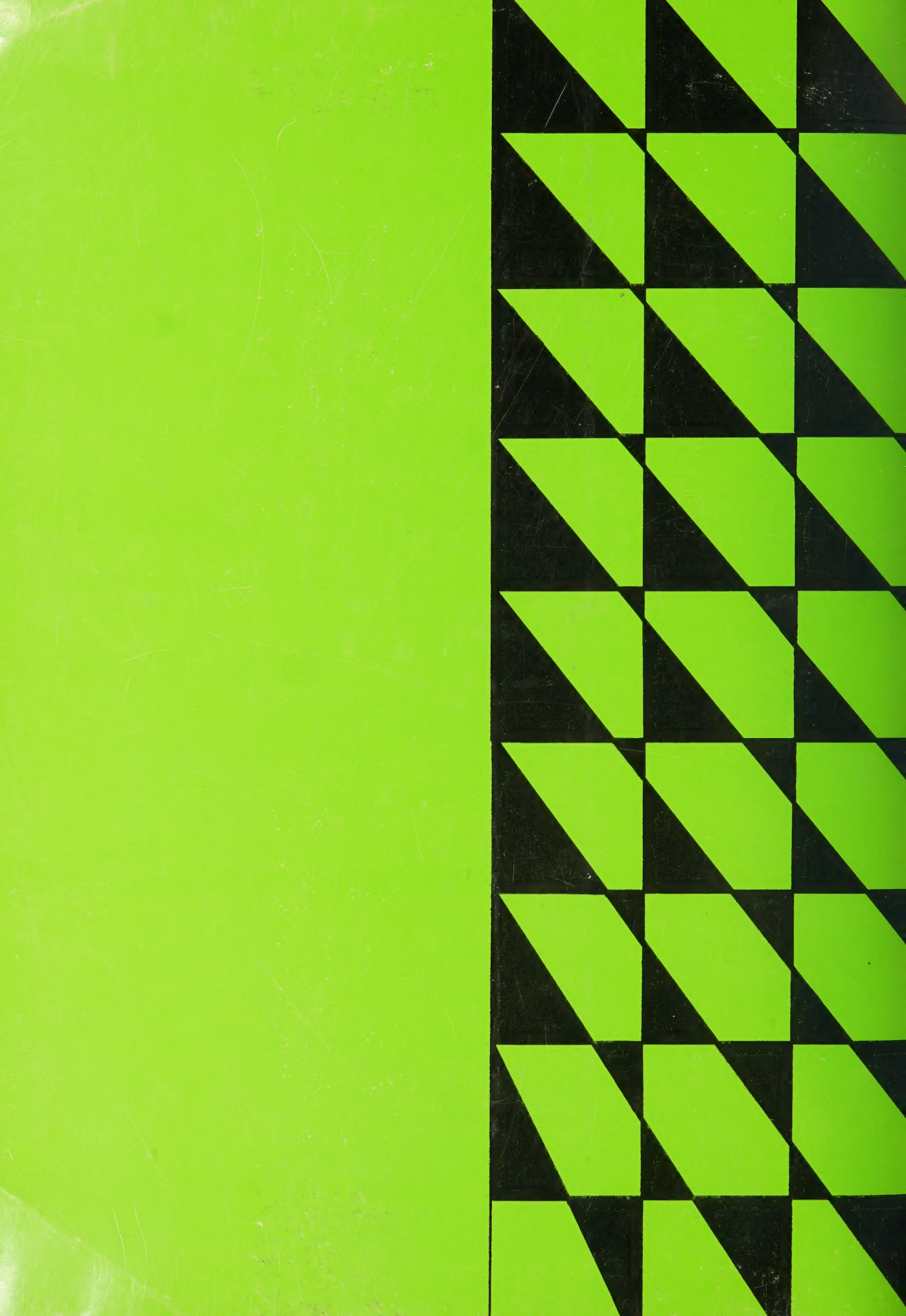
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